

towards this state of the goal-content, it has its openness and positiveness within it.

THE WORLD
IN WHICH UTOPIAN IMAGINATION
HAS A CORRELATE
REAL POSSIBILITY, THE CATEGORIES FRONT,
NOVUM, ULTIMUM AND THE HORIZON

17

The critic can therefore latch on to any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop true reality out of the separate forms of existing reality as their obligation and their final purpose. . . It will then become apparent that the world has long possessed the dream of a matter, of which it must only possess the consciousness in order to possess it in reality.

Marx, letter to Ruge, 1843

I am convinced that the world-spirit gave the age the command to advance; such a command is obeyed; this entity moves irresistibly forward like an armoured, tightly-closed phalanx with the same undiscernible movement with which the sun moves, through thick and thin; countless light troops are flanked around it, for and against, most of them have no idea what it is about and are run through the head, as if by an unseen hand. The best bet, however, is to keep a close eye on the advancing giant.

Hegel, letter to Niethammer, 1816

Man is not solid

To think oneself into what is better, this proceeds at first only inwardly. It indicates how much youth there is in man, how much lies in him that is waiting. This waiting will not go to sleep, however many times it has been buried, even in a desperate man it does not stare into complete nothingness. Even the suicide still flees into negation as into a womb; he expects rest. Even disappointed hope wanders around agonizing, a ghost that has lost its way back to the cemetery and clings to refuted images. It does not perish through itself, but only through a new form of itself. The fact that we can thus *sail* into dreams, that daydreams, often of a completely uncovered kind, are possible, indicates the great space of the still open, still uncertain life in man. Man spins out wishes, is in a position to do so, finds a wealth of material for them, even if it is not always of

the best, most durable quality, in himself. This fermenting and effervescing above the consciousness that has become is the *first correlate* of the imagination, a correlate which to begin with is merely inward, in fact only located within itself. Even the silliest dreams nevertheless exist as foam;* daydreams even contain a foam from which a Venus has sometimes risen. The animal knows nothing of this kind; only man, although he is much more awake, wells up utopianly. His existence is less solid as it were, although, compared with plants and animals, he is much more intensely present. Human existence has nevertheless more fermenting Being, more dawning material on its upper edge and hem. Something has as it were remained hollow here, in fact a new hollow space has only just developed. Dreams drift in it, and possible things circulate inwardly which can perhaps never become outward.

Much in the world is still unclosed

Of course, nothing would circulate inwardly either if the outward were completely solid. Outside, however, life is just as little finished as in the ego which is working on this outside. No thing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world were closed, full of fixed, even perfected facts. Instead of these there are simply processes, i.e. dynamic relationships in which the Become has not completely triumphed. The Real is process; the latter is the widely ramified mediation between present, unfinished past, and above all: possible future. Indeed, everything real passes over into the Possible at its processual Front, and possible is everything that is only partially conditioned, that has not yet been fully or conclusively determined. Here we must of course distinguish between the merely cognitively or objectively Possible and the Real-Possible, the only one that matters in the given context. *Objectively* possible is everything whose entry, on the basis of a mere partial-cognition of its existing conditions, is scientifically to be expected, or at least cannot be discounted. Whereas *really* possible is everything whose conditions in the sphere of the *object itself* are not yet fully assembled; whether because they are still maturing, or above all because new conditions – though mediated with the existing ones – arise for the entry of a new Real. Mobile, changing, changeable Being, presenting itself as dialectical-material, has this unclosed capability of becoming, this Not-Yet-Closedness both in its ground and in its horizon

* Bloch is alluding to the German saying 'Träume sind Schäume' (Dreams are just foam).

So that we may deduce from this: the really Possible of *sufficiently mediated*, i.e. *dialectically-materialistically mediated newness* gives utopian imagination its *second, its concrete correlate*: one outside a mere fermenting, effervescing in the inner circle of consciousness. And as long as the reality has not become a completely determined one, as long as it possesses still unclosed possibilities, in the shape of new shoots and new spaces for development, then no absolute objection to utopia can be raised by merely factual reality. Objections to bad utopias can be raised, i.e. to abstractly extravagant, badly mediated ones, but precisely concrete utopia has in *process-reality* a corresponding element: that of the mediated Novum. Only this process-reality, and not a fact-basedness torn out of it which is reified and made absolute, can therefore pass judgement on utopian dreams or relegate them to mere illusions. If we give every mere factuality in the external world this critical right, then we make what is fixedly existing and what has fixedly become into absolute reality per se. It becomes clear, however, even merely within the vastly altered reality of today, that the restriction to the Factum was hardly a realistic one; that reality itself is not worked up, that it has something advancing and breaking out at its edge. Man today is thoroughly acquainted with the frontier-existence outside the previous expectation-context of Becomeness. He no longer sees himself surrounded by ostensibly completed facts, and no longer considers these as the only Real; devastatingly, possible fascist Nothing has opened up in this Real, and above all, finally feasible and overdue, socialism. A different concept of reality to the narrow and ossified one of the second half of the nineteenth century is thus overdue, a different one to that of the positivism to which the idea of process is alien, and of its counterpart: the non-committal ideal world of pure appearance. Sometimes the ossified concept of reality even penetrated Marxism and consequently made it schematic. It is not sufficient to speak of dialectical process and then to treat history as a series of sequential Fixa or even closed 'totalities'. A narrowing and diminishing of reality threatens here, a turning away from 'efficacy and seed'* in reality; and that is not Marxism. Rather: the concrete imagination and the imagery of its mediated anticipations are fermenting in the process of the real itself and are depicted in the concrete forward dream; anticipating elements are a component of reality itself. Thus the will towards utopia is entirely

* From Goethe's 'Faust', Part I, 384:

'All efficacy and seed explore
and rummage round in words no more.'

compatible with object-based tendency, in fact is confirmed and at home within it.

Militant optimism, the categories Front, Novum, Ultimum

Precisely the defeated man must try the outside world again. That which is coming up is not yet decided, that which is swamp can be dried out through work. Through a combination of courage and knowledge, the future does not come over man as fate, but man overcomes the future and enters it with what is his. However, the knowledge needed by courage and above all decision cannot have the most common mode of previous knowledge: namely a contemplative mode. Because merely contemplative knowledge necessarily refers to what is closed and thus to what is past, it is helpless against what is present and blind to the future. In fact, it appears to itself all the more as knowledge, the further back its objects lie in what is past and closed, the less therefore it contributes to the process of something being learnt for the present and future from history, a history that occurs in tendency. The knowledge necessary for decision accordingly has a different mode: one which is not merely contemplative, but rather one which goes with process, which is actively and partisanly in league with the good which is working its way through, i.e. what is humanly worthy in process. It goes without saying that this mode of knowledge is also the only objective one, the only one which reflects the Real in history: namely the events produced by working people together with the abundant interweaving process-connections between past, present and future. And knowledge of this kind, precisely because it is not merely contemplative, thoroughly mobilizes the subjects of conscious production itself. Since it is not quietism, even in relation to discovered tendency, it does not revere that banal, automatic progress-optimism per se which is only a reprise of contemplative quietism. The optimism is this reprise because it also disguises the future as past, because it regards the future as something which has long since been decided and thus concluded. Confronted with the future-state which stands like an agreed consequence in the so-called iron logic of history, the subject can just as easily lay his hands in his lap as he once folded them when confronted with God's will. In similar fashion, for example, by leaving capitalism to function to its conclusion, it was appointed as its own grave-digger, and even its dialectic appeared to be self-sufficient, to be autarkical. All this is fundamentally false, however,

in fact so patently just new opium for the people that, cum grano salis, even a dash of pessimism would be preferable to the banal, automatic belief in progress as such. Because at least pessimism with a realistic perspective is not so helplessly surprised by mistakes and catastrophes, by the horrifying possibilities which have been concealed and will continue to be concealed precisely in capitalist progress. Thinking ad pessimum, for every analysis which does not make it absolute again, is a better travelling companion than cheap credulity; it thus constitutes the critical coldness precisely in Marxism. For every changing decision, automatic optimism is not much less of a poison than pessimism made absolute; since, if the latter quite openly serves shameless reaction, which calls itself by its own name, with the aim of discouraging, then the former helps shamefaced reaction with the aim of fostering winking connivance and passivity. Thus, rather than false optimism, the only thing that is assigned – in order to foster true optimism – to the knowledge of decision, to the decision of attained knowledge, is once again the *concretely and utopianly comprehended correlate in real possibility*: comprehended as one in which of course it is by no means already the night to end all days, but just as little – in the sense of non-utopian optimism – already the day to end all nights.* The attitude towards this undecided material, which can however be decided through work and concretely mediated action, is called *militant optimism*. Through this, as Marx says, no abstract ideals are realized, but rather the repressed elements of the new, humanized society, that is, of the concrete ideal, are set free. It is the revolutionary decision of the proletariat which today commits itself to the final struggle of liberation, a decision of the subjective factor in alliance with the objective factors of economic-material tendency. And it is not as if this subjective factor, that of realization and of changing the world, were any other than a material activity; it is such, even if, as Marx stresses in the first thesis on Feuerbach, as the *active side* (generation, productivity, spontaneity of consciousness), it has certainly been developed primarily from idealism and not from (mechanical) materialism. And once again it is not as if even for one moment the activity which is part of changing the world, i.e. of militant optimism, could really intervene or bring about lasting change without being allied with real, present tendencies; because if the subjective factor remains isolated, then it simply becomes a factor

* Bloch is playing on a German saying 'It is not yet the night to end all days', an English equivalent of which would be 'We are not yet out of the wood'.

of putschism, not of revolution, of Spiegelbergian forays, * not of the work. If, however, there is insight into the consequences of the decision – and it is precisely the knowledge in the decision which guarantees this insight – then the power of the subjective factor cannot be estimated highly or even deeply enough, precisely as the *militant function* in militant optimism. Concrete decision in favour of the victory of light in real possibility is the same as countermove against failure in process. Is the same as the countermove of freedom against so-called destiny which has been removed from process and which counteracts it through stagnation and reification. Is the same as the countermove against all these deadly manifestations from the family of Nothing and against the circulation of Nothing, the other alternative to real possibility itself. Is thus ultimately the countermove against the pervasive ruin of pure negation (war, advent of barbarism), so that, by redirecting this destruction on to itself, the negation of the negation may also find space here and the dialectic actively triumph. Concrete decision is always in conflict with statics here, yet precisely because it is not putschism, but rather, being militant, is equally *founded* optimism, it lives in peace with process which brushes death-statics itself the wrong way. Man and process, or rather: subject and object in dialectically materialist process, consequently both stand equally on the Front. And there is no other place for militant optimism than the place which the *category of Front* opens up. The philosophy of this optimism, that is, of materially comprehended hope, is itself, as the trenchant knowledge of non-contemplation, concerned with the foremost segment of history, and is so even when it concerns itself with the past, namely with the still undischarged future in the past. Philosophy of comprehended hope thus stands per definitionem on the Front of the world process, i.e. on the so little thought-out, foremost segment of Being of animated, utopianly open matter.

Not everything that is well-known is also known, least of all when freshness is present. Thus along with the concept of the Front the so closely related concept of *newness* is also in a parlous state. The New: it circulates in the mind in first love, also in the feeling of spring; the latter has nevertheless hardly found a single philosopher. It permeates, though it is forgotten time and again, the eve of great events, together with a highly characteristic mixed reaction of fear, being armed, confidence; it finds, in the promised Novum of happiness, advent consciousness. It runs through the expectations of almost all religions, in so far as primitive, even ancient oriental future

* Spiegelberg: the unscrupulous marauder in Schiller's 'The Robbers'.

consciousness can be properly understood at all; it pervades the whole of the Bible, from Jacob's blessing to the Son of Man who makes everything new, and to the new heaven, the new earth. Nevertheless, the *category Novum* has not been described anything like adequately enough, and found no place in any pre-Marxist world-picture. Or if it did seem to find it, as in Boutroux* or above all in the Art Nouveau or secession philosophy of Bergson, then the New was simply considered from the point of view of senselessly changing fashions and celebrated as such; all that resulted from this was the different rigidity of a surprise that is always the same. This kind of thing has already been made clear in the case of the block which has obstructed the concept of the Not-Yet-Conscious for so long; in such a way that the dawning, the *Incipit vita nova*, also repeatedly remains a *Fixum* in the so-called Philosophy of Life. Thus the concept of the New in Bergson simply appears as abstract contrast to repetition, in fact often as merely the reverse side of mechanical uniformity; at the same time it was attributed to every moment of life without exception, and was consequently devalued. Even the duration of a thing, the *durée* which is imagined as being fluid, is based by Bergson on continual difference; supposedly because in truly unchanged persistence the beginning and end of this state would be indistinguishable, would objectively coincide, and consequently the thing would not have duration at all. And the *Novum* as a whole in Bergson is not elucidated by its path, its explosions, its dialectic, its images of hope and genuine products, but in fact repeatedly by the contrast to mechanism, by the contentless declaration of an *élan vital* in and for itself. Great love for the *Novum* is active, great inclination towards openness leaps to the eye, but the process remains empty and repeatedly produces nothing but process. In fact, the eternal metaphysical vitality theory ultimately achieves a mere frenzy instead of the *Novum*, precisely because of the constantly required change of direction, required for its own sake; so it is not the curve praised by Bergson that develops with this change, but rather a zig-zag in which – from sheer opposition to uniformity – there is only the figure of chaos. Consequently, the abstractly understood *Futurum* also ends in a *l'art pour l'art* of vitality which Bergson himself compares to the rocket or 'to an immense firework which continually shoots out new bursts of fire' (*L'Évolution créatrice*, 1907, p. 270). Here too we must emphasize: there is absolutely no genuine *Novum* in Bergson; he has in fact only developed his concept from sheer excess into capitalistic fashion-novelty and thus stabilized it; *élan vital* and

* Émile Boutroux, 1845-1921, French philosopher of science.

nothing more is and remains itself a *Fixum* of contemplation. The social reason for Bergson's pseudo-*Novum* lies in the late bourgeoisie, which has within it absolutely nothing new in terms of content. The corresponding ideological reason ultimately lies in the old, laboriously reproduced elimination of two of the most essential qualities of the *Novum* in general: possibility and finality. In both, Bergson sees the same schematics of deadening reason hostile to change which he sees at work elsewhere as spatialization, causality, mechanism. The mighty realm of *possibility* thus becomes for him an illusion of - retrospection: there is no Possible in Bergson whatsoever, for him it is a projection which is sketched back into the past by what is newly developing. In the Possible, according to Bergson, the just arising *Novum* is only to be conceived as 'having been possible': 'The possible is nothing other than the real plus a mental act which reflects the image of this real into the past, as soon as the real has developed. . . The real welling-up of unforeseeable newness, not predestinated in any possible, is however a real which makes itself possible, not a possible that becomes real (*La Pensée et le Mouvant*, p. 133). Bergson thus characteristically almost reproduces the anti-possibility proof of the Megarian philosopher Diodoros Kronos, who was in fact himself close to the Eleatic philosophers, the teachers of an absolute rest. And similarly, Bergson closes his mind to the concept of the *Novum* by regarding *finality* simply as the establishing of a rigid final goal, rather than as the goal-determination of the human will, which first seeks precisely its *Where To* and *What For*, in the open possibilities of the future. Or rather: as the goal-determination of a work, above all of a planning, which has stressed its *Where To* and *What For* and goes about achieving it. Bergson, however, in equating all foreseeability with static prediction, has not only ignored creative anticipation, this reddening dawn in the human will, but the genuine *Novum* as a whole, the horizon of utopia. And the continually stressed changeableness, boundlessness, hardly made Bergson's newness-universe into what, with nevertheless unmistakable finality, he fantasized it to be: into 'the machine to produce gods'. To sum up: appropriate to the *Novum*, so that it really is one, is not only abstract opposition to mechanical repetition, but actually also a kind of specific repetition: namely of the still unbecome total goal-content itself, which is suggested and tended, tested and processed out in the progressive newnesses of history. Thus moreover: the dialectical emergence of this total content is no longer described by the category *Novum*, but rather by the category *Ultimum*, and with this of course the repetition ends. But it only ends by virtue

of the fact that, to the same extent that the *Ultimum* represents the last, i.e. the highest newness, the repetition (the unremitting representedness of the tendency-goal in all progressively New) intensifies to the last, highest, most fundamental repetition: of identity. And the newness in the *Ultimum* really triumphs by means of its total leap out of everything that previously existed, but it is a leap towards the newness that is ending or identity. The category *Ultimum* has not been left as unconsidered as that of the *Novum*; the idea of the Last Thing has always been a subject of those religions which also set a time-limit to time, and thus above all of Judaeo-Christian philosophy of religion. However, this categorial treatment precisely indicated that the one which properly ought to precede it, that of the *Novum*, was as good as absent. Because in the whole of Judaeo-Christian philosophy, from Philo and Augustine to Hegel, the *Ultimum* relates exclusively to a *Primum* and not to a *Novum*; consequently the Last Thing appears simply as the attained return of an already completed First Thing which has been lost or relinquished. The form of this return incorporates the pre-Christian form of the self-combusting and self-renewing Phoenix, it incorporates the Heraclitean and Stoic doctrine of world-conflagration, according to which the Zeus-fire takes the world back into itself and similarly, in periodic cycles, releases it again. And in fact we may say: the *cycle* is the figure which the *Ultimum* attaches so firmly to the *Primum* that it misfires logically and metaphysically within it. Of course, Hegel saw in the Being-for-itself of the idea, which is its *Ultimum* and in which process dies away as in an amen, the *Primum* of the Being-in-itself of the idea not only reproduced but fulfilled: the 'mediated immediacy' is attained in the Being-for-itself, rather than the unmediated immediacy in the beginning of the mere Being-in-itself. But, as in every individual form-epoch of the world process, and consequently also in its totality, this result nevertheless remained a cyclical one here; it is the cycle, completely free of the *Novum*, of the *restitutio in integrum*: 'Every part of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle which closes in upon itself, . . . the whole thus presents itself as a circle of circles' (*Enzyklopädie*, §15). Likewise, despite having been thought out more thoroughly, the *Ultimum* was also invariably defused here, in that its Omega coils back into the Alpha again without the power of the *Novum*. In the final analysis, this is also true where mechanically and materialistically the Alpha-Omega has been secularized into a ball of vapour out of which the world emerges and into which it disperses again. The original and the archetype of all this remains the Alpha-Omega in the embracing ring of a primal being to which process

returns almost as a prodigal son and undoes the substance of its Novum. These are all in fact prison-formations against real possibility or a disavowal of it which seeks to visualize even the most progressive historical product solely as the re-remembering or restoration of something once possessed, primally lost. Consequently, as is evident precisely in the Ultimatum, in the case of this Novum, but also in that of all previous Novum, only anti-re-remembering, anti-Augustine, anti-Hegel is philosophically appropriate, anti-circle and denial of the ring-principle, that intended from Hegel and Eduard von Hartmann, in fact as far as Nietzsche. Yet hope, which does not want to be just as far at any end as it was at the beginning, does away with the sharp cycle. The dialectic which has its motor in unrest and its goal-content, which in no way exists ante rem, in unappeared essence does away with the dogged cycle. The tension-figures and tendency-forms, the real-ciphers in the world, even these rehearsals on an as yet unsuccessful model, do away with the fundamentally sterile cycle through their especially high percentage of utopia. The humanization of nature has no parental home at the beginning from which it runs away, to which, with a kind of ancestor cult in philosophy, it returns. In fact in process itself, still without the problem of the Ultimatum, a horde of real possibilities emerge which were not predicted of the beginning at birth. And the end is not the bringing back, rather it is – precisely as the impact of the What-essence on the That-ground – the blasting open of the primum agens materiale. In other words: the Omega of the Where To explains itself not with reference to a primally been Alpha, supposedly most real of all, of the Where From, of the origin, but on the contrary: this origin explains itself first with reference to the Novum of the end, indeed, as an origin still essentially unrealized in itself, it first enters reality with this Ultimatum. The origin is certainly the realizing element itself; and yet: just as there is still something immature and not yet realized in the realizing, so the realization of the realizing, of the realizing element itself is always only just starting to begin. In history it is the self-apprehension of the historical doer, working man: in nature it is the realization of that which has been hypothetically called *natura naturans* or subject of material motion, a problem which has hardly been touched on, even though it is clearly connected with the self-apprehension of working man and lies along the line of extension of Marx's 'humanization of nature'. The site for both kinds of self-apprehension and their Novum, their Ultimatum, is however located solely on the Front of the process of history and is predominantly confronted with only mediated-real possibility. *This remains that which*

corresponds to exact anticipation, concrete utopia as objective-real correlate. In the same sense that the concretely utopian is an objective-real degree of reality on the Front of the occurring world, – as Not-Yet-Being of the ‘naturalization of man, humanization of nature’. Correspondingly, the thus designated realm of freedom develops not as return, but as exodus – though into the always intended promised land, promised by process.

*‘What-Is according to possibility’ and ‘What-Is in possibility’,
cold and warm stream in Marxism*

On the path to the New we must usually, though not always, proceed step by step. Not everything is possible or can be implemented at any time, absent conditions not only hinder, they also block. More rapid progress is of course allowed, even demanded, where the stretch ahead shows no other dangers than over-anxiously or pedantically imagined ones. Thus Russia did not first need to become fully capitalist before it could pursue the socialist goal successfully. Even the complete technological conditions for the construction of socialism could be made good in the Soviet Union, in so far as they had already been developed in other countries and could be taken over from there. On the other hand, obviously, a path which has never been travelled before can only be skipped or jumped over with some failures. Because of course everything is possible for which the conditions exist in a sufficiently partial form, but this is precisely why everything is still factually impossible for which the conditions do not yet exist at all. The goal-image then proves to be subjectively and objectively an illusion; the movement towards it then collapses; at best, if it makes headway, as a consequence of the prevailing and determining socio-economic conditions, a totally different goal is achieved from the one intended in this skipping over, abstract sense. Of course, in the bourgeois ideal dream of human rights, from the outset the tendencies were already active which subsequently ushered in the purest capitalism. But even here a city of brotherly love hovered ahead anyway, a Philadelphia, particularly far removed from the real Philadelphia which was on the agenda of economic history and consequently saw the light of day. And nothing much more than a Philadelphia of that kind would have been the fruit of the pure, the simply chiliastic utopias, if they had not collapsed but had reached the goal according to the measure of the Possible at that time. The economic conditions which the radical will towards the millennium from Joachim